

“Turning Point”

Acts 13:1-3

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

It's so good to be with you today and I am so excited about jumping into our text. We have a lot to cover and I am more than ready to pick back up in our FORWARD series...it's a study in the New Testament book of Acts.

Now, if you are new to the church...and I realize we have a lot of guests...always do around the first of the year. We want to welcome you to Champion Forest. I'm telling you, you have come to the most friendly and joyful congregation in Northwest Houston.

No...change that...you have come to the most friendly and joyful congregation in ALL of Houston...that sounds better and extremely accurate in my opinion!

And listen no matter why you are here today or what your story may be:

- You could be visiting for the first time as part of a new year's resolution and you're just checking this church thing out...
- Or maybe you are new to the area...
- Or perhaps you're here every single week...

Regardless of why you are here or what prompted you to get here, I promise you this...as we start 2022 off, if you will stay with us...if you will come each week with a Bible – and if you don't have one, go to our Connections Desk in the atrium, we'll get you a copy of God's Word.

But if you will bring your Bible, I want to encourage you to get a notebook (I'm going to talk about journaling a bit later on in the message) – but if you will grab a notebook and take notes and follow along while you are here.

I'm telling you, you do this consistently...engage in the worship...engage in God's Word...you do this and I PROMISE you God will work in your heart and life in 2022 unlike ever before!

And if you really want to jump in the deep-end, get in a Life Group...it's where we break this big church down into small groups where you can pray together, serve together, walk through life's up's and downs together.

You wouldn't be here today if you didn't want to grow in your relationship with the Lord, and as a church that is what we are here to help you do...and so Life Group, Worship Attendance, combined with your own personal time with Jesus...I'm telling you it's a GAME CHANGER in your life.

And this sets up perfect for where we are going to go today because as we get to Acts 13, it is a PIVOTAL moment in the history of the early church.

From the establishment of the Church in Acts 2, most of the leadership...most of the action...the mass majority of the ministry that has taken place, from in and around Jerusalem. It has been “home base” if you will for the church.

However, as we saw in previous chapters (and if you have missed ANY of these messages, download our app or go online and you can find them, listen to them and catch up to where we are today) – in previous chapters, mainly due to persecution what we saw was the church begin to spread into other regions outside of Jerusalem and where we left off is the real “mind-blower” – and that is the Holy Spirit came to the Gentiles.

And so, God is leading his people to see that Jesus is not just for Jews...he’s for everyone! And the local church that this really takes root in and begins to blossom as both “Jew and Gentile” coming together as one under Christ is the church in Antioch.

It’s here that followers of Jesus (Acts 11:26) are first called Christians and it’s here that Barnabas and Saul (i.e. Paul) stay for a year meeting with these believers and evangelizing the area.

And the church in Antioch becomes the catalytic church that starts the strategic advancement of the gospel into and around the world.

I’m calling the message today: **Turning Point**

What we are going to see in the message this morning is a local church that is committed to seeking God. And their commitment to seeking God results in a “Turning Point” in the history of the Church.

And listen: I believe what is true for a local church is true for an individual. If you are here today and in the need for a “turning point” in your life spiritually, then commit to seek God as this early church did and just watch what it results in.

Let’s get after it and see exactly how they committed themselves to God...what did this look like:

Acts 13:1 – “Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.”

Now, I won’t stay here long simply because this verse is NOT the focus of the message today, but let’s just camp out here for a moment. We are given here the names of five people in the church (they are called “prophets and teachers”) so clearly they are the leaders of this church or the churches in Antioch.

Remember, they didn’t have churches like this...like we see on nearly every corner of our community. We’re talking about believers meeting in homes all across Antioch which was a

major city...the capital city in what is today, modern day Syria. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire and at its peak had around 1 million residents.

And so, we don't know how many believers were in this church...in these local house churches at this time. I do want you to notice that "church" is singular here. While meeting in different homes, it's seen as one church – this speaks to its unity and togetherness!

Also, notice the names of these leaders. They are one and together, but look at how extremely diverse they are!

- Barnabas – he's the main leader in the church at Antioch at this time.

Remember, he is the "encourager"! He's the one that sold land and gave it as an offering so that needs could be met in Jerusalem. He brought converted Saul to the disciples and made that introduction. He was sent by the leaders of the church in Jerusalem to check out what was going on in Antioch. And he's the one that actually went and got Saul from Tarsus and brought him Antioch.

- Saul is mentioned here...he doesn't really need an introduction. Needless to say, both Barnabas and Saul/Paul are Jewish.
- Simeon who was called Niger – "Niger" is a Latin word meaning "black" or dark". He was dark-skinned, most likely from Africa...don't know much about him. Some scholars suggest this could be the Simon of Cyrene, that helped carry the cross of Jesus, but there is no way of knowing for sure.
- Lucius of Cyrene is mentioned here. Cyrene is North Africa as well.
- Manaen is the last name mentioned. We're told that he had an aristocratic background having grown up with Herod Antipas – the one who killed John the Baptist and mocked Jesus.

So, check out the leadership of what will be this GAME-CHANGING church in Antioch. Three are Jewish...two are Gentile. They are from:

- different places...
- different backgrounds...
- some educated...
- some not so much...
- some wealthy...
- some poor...

These are the leaders in this church! There is a diversity there, but also a unity as well! Pretty remarkable, right?!

It's exactly what we strive for here at Champion Forest. Here in the 4th largest city in North America and in one of the most diverse cities in North America - we want our church to reflect our community - MORE than that we want our church to reflect the Kingdom!

And so, like this early church, we need to celebrate the our unity in the midst of diversity! I love what commentator **Lloyd J. Ogilvie** wrote: **“The teachers and prophets of Antioch are an interesting mixture. They show what an interracial, cross-cultural church had grown up in that metropolitan city which from this point on because the headquarters of missionary Christianity. The Lord had called into the fellowship and into leadership positions people from several nations. A fellowship from the then-known world could be led to the decision of wanting to reach the world.”**

I read that...underlined it in my commentary and thanked God that I could be a part of a church like Champion Forest in a city like Houston, TX.

May what happened in Antioch continue to happen here! That people from all nations come and we celebrate the oneness we have in Christ and that God would continue to give us a heart to reach all nations...to go to the world!

Illus. DREAM Celebration - It's so beautiful...and just a little commercial break here, but this is what our DREAM celebration is all about! Next Sunday, I hope that you will make plans to join us on Sunday evening at 6pm... (**PROMO DREAM SLIDE** – BK Bridge, Dr. Fred Luter, special interview with Dr. David Fleming)

Now, we see this MAJOR turning point in church history taking place here in Acts 13. Paul's first missionary journey...a missionary journey that will last for well over a year, almost two years...it will cover 700 miles by land and 500 miles by sea:

- scores of people will be saved...
- discipled...
- ultimately a huge number of churches will be planted...

And look at this – it is a direct result of this church in Antioch committing to seek God and we see them earnestly seeking him through prayer and fasting and worship.

Acts 13:2-3 – “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”

Okay...now, we are getting somewhere! The “Turning Point” came as this church was seeking God through prayer and fasting and worship.

Now, we're going to hammer this today. As a church – our primary and MOST important objective is to seek the Lord. And we seek him:

- though prayer...

- through fasting...
- and through worship...

It's in these three activities that the presence of God is manifested in our lives and in our church.

Prayer and fasting and worship, is the supernatural secret sauce (makes me hungry for In & Out!) that ushers in the Holy Spirit to instruct, speak to and guide and opens us up (our ears and heart) to actually hear what God has to say!

I'm convinced of this. I'm convinced that churches and even our personal, spiritual lives are impotent primarily because we fail to aggressively and routinely seek God through prayer, fasting and worship.

And so, let's talk about this and let's commit to this today! Let's posture ourselves...put ourselves in position to make 2022 a "Turning Point" year, and we can do this I believe by making prayer, fasting and worship a regular part of our spiritual diet.

Now, as we talk through each of these activities or spiritual disciplines, if you'd like to call them that, each will have a personal and corporate element to them.

In other words, this idea of a "turning point" it will apply on a personal level. For some, you need a spiritual revival. Your spiritual life is like a dead car battery. It's there, but it needs a jump. Think of prayer and fasting and worship as jumper cables to your heart.

As a church, it's the same thing. Often times were off and running and doing our own thing, running our own plays, making our own plans and wonder why we don't see God moving. It could be that we haven't done OR aren't doing the ministry of the church.

Oh, we've got the activities down. We've got the programs implemented, but the reality is it's not what God has told us to do or led us to do...we didn't spend the time praying and worshipping and fasting and truly hear from God.

And we wonder why God isn't moving...we wonder why this activity or this program is limping along. Maybe it's because we've asked God to get on our agenda instead of seeking God through prayer and worship and fasting and let him tell us what his agenda for us is! Just a thought!

So, let's talk about each of these activities. The first is: **Worship**

Now, worship has been defined in many ways, by many different people. Sometimes when we think of worship, we think of singing. And while that may be a part of it, worship is WAY more than singing. Let me give you a simple definition.

Worship – a right and willing response to who God is and what he does.

We get our word “worship” from the old English word, “worth-ship”. We worship God because he is worthy – “worth-ship”. He is worthy because of who he is and what he has done. And worship is our response to this.

In true worship there is always a right attitude present. Jesus said it like this in **John 4:24** – **“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”**

True worshippers worship the Lord in humility...in reverence...there is no pretense or hypocrisy...it’s from the heart – I say it’s a “right and willing response.”

So, there is a right attitude present, and in true worship there is always a response to God – who he is and what he has done. By response, I mean there is action.

- It may be the lifting of the hands...
- It may be bowing the knee...
- It may be lying prostrate on the ground...
- It may be giving an offering...
- It may be in singing and praising him...
- It may be acting in obedience to what God has called you to do...

Worship is a right and willing response (and what I just mentioned are some responses we see in scripture – there are more) to who God is and what God has done/is doing in our lives.

This early church here was gathered together and the scripture says (v. 2) – while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, The Holy Spirit said...”

Write it down! God spoke to them in a corporate worship setting. Now, personal worship is awesome and VERY important. And if we want to live Holy Spirit empowered lives, we need to set aside time every single day where we are worshipping the Lord and by his grace walk in a spirit of worship in everything we do!

We can worship as we work...some of you are thinking, “not where I work!” But you can! And this should be the goal – with every breath I take, let it be worship unto you.

So, if it’s teaching – make it an act of worship!

If it’s coaching – make it an act of worship!

If it’s banking or management of some kind – make it worship, do it as unto the Lord!

If it’s arguing a case in court or performing a surgery or delivering a pizza or mowing a yard – make it an act of worship!

Col. 3:17 – **“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”**

THIS is worship...we are to make worship a regular part of our personal lives, but I stress...the Church received its orders here in Acts 13 while they were corporately worshipping the Lord.

Listen to me...corporate worship...what we are experiencing together right now is so very important. The Spirit of God manifests himself when believers are gathered together for the express purpose of worshipping him.

The writer of Hebrews warns us in **Hebrews 10:25** – “**don’t neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some...**”

I appreciate online services and we will continue to put them up for people who are sick, immobile or traveling. We love putting our messages out there. If you are staying home for health reasons, great! But if you are staying home for habit reasons...or hobby reasons...that’s a problem!

God’s Spirit is here...he shows up and speaks when his people are gathered and if you are not here, you could miss out on what God has to say to us!

There’s so much more I’d like to say about this, but simply don’t have the time. I do want to underscore though this corporate worship experience...the necessity of it! We ALL need this! Every week. Make it a priority and just watch what God does with your life.

We need MORE times of gathering together corporately NOT less...seeking the Lord in worship and in prayer.

Illus. Night of Prayer (show promo slide) – This is the heart of our Nights of Prayer. We started this in the Fall. The goal is to have a one major night of Prayer in the Spring and another in the Fall, with smaller gatherings throughout the year.

This Wednesday night right here in this room, we will have a Global (combination of Spanish and English together) for the express purpose to seek God in worship and prayer.

You do NOT want to miss this Wednesday night! We are going to worship, we are going to pray and ordain five of our Spanish church planter/pastors, license two pastors and pray over three of our residents that are starting this year. It’s going to be an hour long get after the heart of God prayer service. I hope you’ll join us!

And this leads right into the next activity of the church. For the sake of time, I’m actually going to combine these next activities...these next disciplines because they are so closely related.

Here they are: **Prayer and Fasting**

Acts 13:3 – “**Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.**”

Now, prayer is by its most simple definition: **Prayer is communion with God.**

Let’s not overcomplicate this. Prayer is talking with God and allowing him through his Word and by his Spirit to speak to you. Prayer...get this: connects us to God.

Now, let's define fasting: **Fasting is abstaining from something physical** (i.e. food, entertainment, technology – we'll talk more about this in just a moment) **for a period of time in order to seek God in a deeper more meaningful way.**

I got this statement from Chris Hodges, a pastor in Alabama. He said of prayer and fasting. Prayer connects us to God. Fasting disconnects us from the world. Pretty good!

Here is another way you could say it: **Fasting is starving the flesh and feeding the Spirit**

Now, let me give you the biblical basis for fasting and this is what I want us to settle in on and emphasize in the last part of the message. I think we get prayer...all of us know we need to grow in our prayer life...go to a deeper level in our prayer life.

And this is why fasting is so good to talk about, because we can't fast without praying. They go hand in hand.

Bill Bright the former leader of Campus Crusade for Christ was known for his seasons of fasting. He said:

“I believe the power of fasting as it relates to prayer is the spiritual atomic bomb that our Lord has given us to destroy the strongholds of evil and usher in a great revival and spiritual harvest around the world.”

Let me give you the biblical basis of it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is teaching and in the same context as praying and giving...in fact it's sandwiched right between his teaching on these two subjects, is the subject of fasting.

Matt. 6:16-18 – “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when (doesn't say if...it says WHEN) you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Matt. 9:14-15 – “Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” ¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.”

Fasting is mentioned 70+ times in scripture. We see figures like Moses, Samuel, David, Samson, Hannah, Jonathan, Elijah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul – ALL of these men and women and MORE went through seasons of fasting.

In their case they gave up physical food (remember fasting disconnects us from the world, and what disconnects us from the world more than food) – these men and women abstained from food for a season in order to seek God in a deeper more meaningful way.

We don't fast to necessarily get things FROM God...we fast to get more of God.

We see people in scripture fasting and asking the Lord for greater wisdom, direction, protection. We see them fasting as a sign of humility and repentance...expressing their dependence upon God.

Fasting is a NORM in scripture. And it should be a norm in our life. It is craving spiritual intimacy OVER physical intake. It's being hungry for something more eternal.

If you are ready for a "turning point" in your life spiritually, I want to introduce you to fasting today. I want to encourage you to starve your flesh for a season...for a period of time...in order to feed the Spirit.

And I want us to do this together. So, I'm calling you personally to fast, but I'm also calling us to this corporately and on the week of Jan. 17-23 – I'm calling our entire church to a week of prayer and fasting.

So, we are going to ramp up to this. Tomorrow, if you have signed up for the Essential 100 reading plan, you will get your first devotional and bible reading in your email. If you haven't scan this code (**SHOW CODE**) or sign up at championforest.org/devotional

I want us to be reading this together! Imagine the whole church reading God's word together...then on Wed, we are going to come together to pray together...then next week, I'm going to ask you to take a day, three days, the full week – the key is you have a week to worship and pray and talk to God about what kind of fast he wants you to do.

I would just ask you what's going to help you disconnect from the world the most? For some, you need to fast from television for a week. Or from social media or technology. For others it may be a Daniel fast where you only eat fruits and vegetables. Or maybe you want to give up a meal a day each day of the week or fast for an entire day – now, remember fasting is NOT dieting...it may help but that's not the point.

There are a TON of articles out there on fasting...you can do your own work, the key is ask God what is going to help you disconnect from the world the most so you can seek him at a deeper more meaningful level.

You have all this week to pray about it and study up on it...and we'll actually put a link to some resources in my "notes" page on this sermon, so if you want to go deeper in it, you can. Don't bite off more than you can chew when it comes to fasting (pun intended!)

Start small, but get you a bible, get you a journal and just watch what God does as you pray and fast. It's not easy. It's a sacrifice and that's part of what makes fasting so beautiful is that it reminds us that we should be living a life of sacrifice.

But, I'm telling you...when I talk about fasting and "turning points", I know what I'm talking about.

Illus. Personal testimony and journal – Two years ago I was on day five of a 21 day fast. Now, lest you think I am super-spiritual I am not. I was desperate for God though...(Share story and read journal)

It was a turning point...and it came because of worship and prayer and fasting.

I want MORE of this for me...I want it for you...and I want it for our church. I ask you to join with me today...and let's seek God unlike ever before.

Would you pray with me?

Fasting Resources:

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting/personal-guide-to-fasting.html>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/fasting-for-beginners>

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